

## FACT SHEET

# CRYPTOSPORIDIOSIS

(CRYPTO)

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### What is cryptosporidiosis?

*Cryptosporidium* is a parasite that causes diarrhea in both animals and humans. People can become ill with cryptosporidiosis (often called “crypto”) by coming into contact with persons or animals shedding the parasite, or by drinking contaminated water. The disease is most common during warm, humid months.

### Who gets cryptosporidiosis?

Anyone can get cryptosporidiosis. Children under 2 years of age, animal handlers, travelers, men who have sex with men, and close contacts of infected persons are more likely to be infected.

### How is cryptosporidiosis spread?

*Cryptosporidium* is found in the feces (stool) of an infected person or animal. It is spread by putting something in the mouth that has been contaminated with the stool from an infected person or animal. It can also be spread by swallowing contaminated food or water.

### What are the symptoms of cryptosporidiosis?

The major symptom of cryptosporidiosis is frequent and watery diarrhea accompanied by cramping belly pain. Other symptoms may include headache, nausea, vomiting, and low-grade fever. Some people have no symptoms. Symptoms may briefly improve and then get worse again, but people who are healthy usually get well in 14-30 days. Persons whose immune systems do not work properly may become seriously ill.

### How soon do symptoms appear?

Symptoms appear between 2 - 10 days after infection with the parasite.

### What is the treatment for cryptosporidiosis?

People who are healthy almost always improve without taking any medications. They should drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration due to diarrhea. Consult a healthcare provider before taking antidiarrheal medication. A medication called nitazoxanide may be used to treat some people with cryptosporidiosis.

### What can be done to prevent the spread of cryptosporidiosis?

- Wash your hands and children’s hands with soap and water after using the toilet, changing diapers, handling animals, and before eating or preparing food. Use a paper towel to turn off faucets after washing hands.
- Cover diaper changing table with paper and discard paper after each diaper change. Clearly separate diapering and food-preparation or play areas. Use disposable gloves for diaper changes, and wash hands after gloves are removed.
- Crypto is resistant to bleach. Instead, use 3% hydrogen peroxide or 5% ammonia to disinfect surfaces. Ammonia should not be combined with bleach or other chlorine containing products since toxic fumes may result.
- Do not swallow water used for recreation. Infected persons should stop using swimming pools or other aquatic facilities while ill and for at least 2 weeks after diarrhea resolves. People can pass the parasite in stool and contaminate water for weeks after symptoms have stopped. *Cryptosporidium* is resistant to chlorine and can survive for days in chlorine-treated water.
- Wash all raw fruits and vegetables before serving. If contamination of water is suspected, it can be made safe by bringing it to a rolling boil for 1 minute.
- Exclude children with diarrhea from daycare after one loose stool.
- If an outbreak occurs, daycares should disinfect surfaces at least twice daily. Dishwasher safe toys should be washed in a commercial machine that exceeds 113° F for 20 min or 162° F for 1 min. Cloth toys should be heat dried in clothes dryer for 30 minutes.
- Avoid fecal exposure during sexual activity.